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S E C R E T BASRAH 000010

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER IZ

SUBJECT: BASRAH GOVERNOR FAILS TO IMPOSE BOYCOTT ON BRITISH FORCES

REF: BASRAH 0003, 05 BASRAH 0122, 05 BASRAH 0132

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1) (S) Summary: The Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) held a very contentious meeting the night of January 25 to discuss their response to recent MND(SE) arrest operations that netted Iraqi Police Service (IPS) members. Some of those arrested have links to the provincial governor, Mohammed Mosabeh Mohammed Al Wa'ili and the Fadhliah party in Basrah. Governor and Fadhliah party supporters failed in their attempts at the meeting to impose an immediate boycott of British forces until the detainees are released. A forty-eight hour cessation of cooperation with British forces expired at 1500hrs today, January 26, 2006. Regional Embassy Office Basrah has received a written request from the BPC to mediate the crisis. End Summary.

2) (S) On January 23, 2006 British forces carried out arrest operations in Basrah. These operations were in response to a recent upsurge of anti-MNF activity in Basrah, which took the lives of two AmCit police trainers on January 18 (ref A). Those targeted are believed to be directly responsible for IED attacks, indirect fire attacks (IDF) and recent assassinations in the city. Among those arrested were Major Jassim Hassan, assistant to the Criminal Intelligence Director in Basrah and Captain Abbas Munis Abdulaal, the son of the sheikh of the Al Halaf tribe. Jassim is considered by many to be working closely with the Basrah Governor.

3) (C) Some members of the BPC called for the immediate release of the detainees, threatening a boycott of MNF-I if their demands were not met. During the BPC meeting held the evening of January 25 Fadhliah Party members tried to pass a measure instituting a boycott against British forces. The debate within the council chambers was loud and contentious. (Note: A REO FSN was outside the chambers during the meeting. The noise level was high enough to allow for most of the proceedings to be overheard. End note.) At one point Fadhliah party members shouted down and then ordered the removal of Council Member Ghali Najam Muter of the Iraqi National Accord Party for advocating dialog with the British. Mr. Ghali left the proceedings but returned a short time later to continue the debate.

4) (S) Despite their best efforts, the Fadhliah Party was not able to pass the measure calling for a boycott of British forces. Instead they passed a resolution calling for a cessation of cooperation with British forces until 1500hrs January 26. This was a clear victory for those voices of moderation on the BPC. In conversations with REO FSN after the meeting, Mr. Ghali and Mr. Akeel Talib, (restrict) BPC Spokesman, admitted that Major Jassim is known to have carried out anti-MNF-I attacks and assassinations of civilians in Basrah. They are hoping the British will provide evidence that proves Jassim and Abbas' guilt making it easier for the council to act against Fadhliah party members that support their actions.

4) (C) Around noon today, January 26, a letter arrived from the BPC addressed to REO Basrah and signed by its Chairman Mohammad Saadon Sahr Al Ubadi. The letter requested REO assistance in mediating the crisis. (Note: This is not the first time that REO Basrah has mediated between the BPC and the British.. See ref. B. End note.) The Deputy Regional Coordinator has been in touch with the British Embassy Office to inform them of the request.

5) (S) Comment: The arrest of Maj. Jassim and other members of the IPS puts Governor Mohammad and the Fadhliah party in a weak position. Not only has he lost a key ally in the police forces, which the Governor has used in the past as his private militia (ref C), but also the information that Maj. Jassim has could be highly incriminating against him and his party. This would explain his strident rhetoric in public and his "gloves off" approach with the BPC. There are also reports that members of his own party are not happy with the Governor, a man not well liked in Basrah, who is tainted by allegations of corruption. He is not expected to be re-elected in the next provincial elections. Governor Mohammad has resisted efforts in the past to have him removed from office; however, this may be his biggest challenge yet. End Comment.

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